



This type of coal heater was used to heat the Rock Island Arsenal Soldiers' Barracks. It was cast at the Arsenal foundry from the original 1885 pattern. The photograph on the right shows a coal heater in an 1898 squad room in the Barracks Building.

These are easy to identify by the shape, resembling a person with a pot-belly, thus the common name. You can see the two doors: the top one was for shoveling coal into the heater, the bottom one was for collecting ashes. This model had an exhaust pipe extending upward to safely vent the smoke. Enterprising soldiers could balance tin cups on the lid to heat their coffee.

Coal was distributed by the Quartermaster. A captain could requisition up to 4500 pounds of coal for the winter period October 1st to April 30th for his men. Coal heaters were surprisingly efficient, and as long as there was somebody to shovel the coal into it and empty the ash tray, it was quite low-maintenance. It did have a reserve supply holder to continuously feed the heater in a heat exchange cycle. On the right hand side at the bottom of the pot there is a lever that was used to pop off the body for maintenance.

Around the base of this coal heater you can see the words "Coal Heater No. 6 RIA", proof of provenance from our Arsenal. (Nancy Neuhaus)

Bibliography: SF Gate Home Guides, Pot-bellied Coal Stove/Heaters
Archival Text from Rock Island Arsenal Museum
Pinterest.com Parts of a Coal heater
Revised United States Army Regulations 1863 Article XLII Quartermaster's Department